



Five-card Majors Continued

Opening One of a Major

WELL, well, well – it has taken me four articles to get on to this vital topic! This month and in the next issue we will be looking at some of the techniques associated with the scheme.

Advantages

By opening 1♥/1♠ with five cards, partner can judge much better on several levels:

- i) Partner can use the ‘Level of the Fit’ principle to be guided as to how far to raise when responding (see later).
- ii) Partner can judge better how far to compete in contested auctions.
- iii) Making simple raises immediately is much easier than in Acol where you have to bid another suit first. Ambiguity often then arises as to whether the responder actually holds real support or is just grudgingly giving preference at his second turn to bid.
- iv) Playing a system which is used globally allows you to play (or at least understand more) with all sorts of partners and opponents at home, abroad, or even online!

Disadvantages

- i) Lack of familiarity – trust me, it is well worth the effort!
- ii) The need to play ‘prepared minors’ or ‘short club’.

Before we go on, I wish to dispel one widely held myth as totally false . . .

‘If I open 1♣, I deny holding a five-card major.’

No, you don’t! If you were to hold a hand with six clubs and a five-card major, you should still open your longest suit first – rather than warping the hand by opening your five-card major. (Rant over . . .)

Requirements

Just a normal hand with at least five cards in the major opened. Normal guidelines should help you here (Rule of Twenty, or whatever other judgement guide you already use). One early point to mention is that holding a five-card major but in the range for a strong no-trump (15-17, remember), I think you are much better off long term by opening 1NT and not the major. This is against classical Acol thinking, I know – but it certainly is a winning proposition. Consider these hands:

Hand 1 ♠ A Q 9 7 6 ♥ 8 5 ♦ K 4 3 ♣ Q 6 5	Hand 2 ♠ A Q 9 7 6 ♥ 8 5 ♦ K 4 3 ♣ K 5 3
Hand 3 ♠ A Q 9 7 6 ♥ A 7 ♦ K 4 3 ♣ K 5 2	

Hand 1: I recommend passing (except in third seat, where opening would be fairly normal).

Hand 2 is a normal 1♠ opening in any seat.

Hand 3 is a choice of opening 1♠ or 1NT. As mentioned, I *definitely* prefer 1NT.

Raising the Major to the Two Level

This is usually done with three trumps (or occasionally four with a poor/stodgy hand). Care should be taken since rather than requiring 6-9 high-card points, in practice the raise to two is much more likely to be based on 5-10 HCP.

Because the length of the suit opened (five) is known, it makes life as responder *much easier* when you have a fit. For

example, if partner opens 1♥, you should raise to 2♥ with each of the following hands:

Hand A ♠ 7 6 2 ♥ K 8 5 ♦ Q 8 7 6 3 ♣ J 9	Hand B ♠ A J 9 6 ♥ K 8 5 ♦ 9 4 3 ♣ 6 5 3
Hand C ♠ Q 5 ♥ A 7 6 ♦ K J 4 3 ♣ 7 5 4 2	

Hand A: normal and uncontroversial.

Hand B: no need to introduce spades as you would do in Acol, since an eight-card fit is known (usually only bother with five spades). If partner makes a further bid, he can always introduce a four-card spade suit should he have one, so the spade fit will come to light if game is possible.

Hand C: note that a *balanced* 10-count with three trumps should normally only raise to the two level. This is *very important*: holding a 10-count with either a five-card side-suit or a singleton would make the hand too good for a simple raise to the two level.

Raising the Major to the Three Level

There are various approaches here. I favour using the ‘Level of the Fit’ principle (you bid to make as many tricks as you have trumps between the two hands) to allow you nearly always to bid to the three level (= nine tricks) when the partnership has a combined nine trumps, and often bid straight to the four level (= ten tricks) when ten trumps (or more!) are held.

For more information and lots of exercises, please carry on reading online.

